

French Senators Debate Wiretapping

PARIS, June 19—The French Senate today opened a debate on allegations that government phone-tapping is often aimed at spying on Frenchmen's private lives.

Two Senate critics of the government caused a minor uproar by charging that a police officer had warned them not to speak in the session.

One of the critics, Republican Independent Sen Dominique Pado, also claimed that records of tapped conversations were being leaked to a point where "certain revelations are the delight of Paris salons."

Many senators supported a proposal for the creation of an independent commission to control the government's use of wiretapping, but Secretary of State Olivier Stirn, defending the government, insisted that existing laws gave the public all the necessary guarantees.

There have been repeated charges that the government has gone way beyond such limits, including an allegation that one jealous ministerial aide had his mistress' telephone bugged.

Pado, whose party is allied with the ruling Gaullists, denounced the alleged warning by the police as an "astounding action." He said the officer warned himself and Sen. Rene Dilligent that it would be "wise" to keep out of the debate.

Stirn raised shouts of disbelief when he assured senators that the government never listened to calls made by members of Parliament. He said members of Parliament might figure in wire-tapping records if they talked with people under investigation.

Press reports have put the number of individual taps at a range of 1,500 to 50,000. But Stirn dismissed even the lower figure as "excessive and absurd."

"Their number," he said, "which naturally varies according to the period in accordance with the importance of the subversive actions that have to be checked, has never been as low as at present."

The government, he said, was particularly concerned over "the activities of extremist movements of the right and left whose aim is to attack and destroy republican institutions."

Wiretapping, he said, was nothing new. "All the governments of the Third, the Fourth, and the Fifth Republic

have used this method. It exists in every country and I do not think that in the future government will be able to do without it."

Sen. Pierre Marchal, a widely respected unaffiliated centrist, said that no wiretap was legal unless specifically authorized in writing. Those who take part in unauthorized taps are open to criminal proceedings, he said.

He told the government, "It is the pre-war Boulevard theater it used to be a good joke to open a door unexpectedly to make the person whose ear was glued to the other side fall over. Watch out for that sort of thing because, without being unkind, we shouldn't like to see you fall."